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The Jack Ruby Enigma

"At the heart of those doubts is the unwillingness or the inability . . . to accept the capricious malice of chance — the malignant fate that could place Lee Oswald in the one job that would give him a window from which to strike senselessly at a despised world, that could allow Jack Ruby an unplanned left turn into history, in which the one-time Chicago street kid . . . could convulse humanity."—Tom Wicker in The New York Times, Jan. 5, 1967, after the imprisoned Jack Ruby died of cancer in Dallas.

By Ira Berkow

NEARLY NINE years later the questions concerning the assassination of President Kennedy and the murder of Oswald remain convulsive.

For one man in Detroit, the impact has been particularly great. He is Earl Ruby, Jack Ruby's brother (the youngest of nine children — Jack was sixth — of Polish-Jewish immigrants) and executor of his will.

"You still feel it in a lot of ways — what people consider the unanswered questions," said Earl Ruby recently. "Like not long ago my daughter comes home from college. She's concerned. She says, 'Daddy, friends at school have been saying that you and your brother Jack were involved with the government in a conspiracy.'

"And I told her, 'You tell those people, honey, that your uncle was not in the CIA, not in the FBI, not involved in any way.'"

Earl Ruby, with glasses and graying sideburns, propped up his right leg on the desk in his office of the large cleaning and dyeing plant he owns. The 61-year-old Ruby grimaced, from the pain of an old football injury to his right knee.

"People have been asking for another commission to investigate the shootings," said Ruby, "And I'd welcome it. And what would they find? Nothing. Nothing that they haven't got. It would show once and for all that Jack did it on his own.

"There have been two investigative commissions — the Warren Commission and the more recent Rockefeller Commission. They found no evidence that Jack was acting within a conspiracy. And I would bet my life that they're right.

"I know my brother Jack. That's how he was. He did it on his own. He did many things on impulse."

The world knows full well the details of that morning of Nov. 24, 1963, when, in the bowels of a Dallas police station, Jack Ruby slipped through a police guard to shoot Oswald at point blank range — before an international television audience.

"One thing a lot of people may not realize today," said Earl Ruby, "was how much President Kennedy meant to people of our generation. He was our age. He was one of us. And we loved him. Look on my wall there. I had that picture of President Kennedy put there when I bought this plant, Cobo Cleaners, in 1961.

"And Jack was very patriotic. I remember him fighting years ago if someone insulted President Roosevelt, or President Eisenhower. And Jack was a damned good street fighter. You almost had to be to survive the ghetto where we grew up.

"Barney Ross, the great champ, was from the neighborhood and a friend of Jack's. He testified at the trial about Jack's patriotism. And Barney once told me that if Jack ever took the ring seriously, he could have been a champ, too.

"Jack also defended the Jews strongly. I remember once when Jack was on leave from the Air Force during World War II. We were at the bar of the Glass Hat in the Congress Hotel in Chicago. We overheard a man say, 'Oh, the war will be over when the Jews get through making all their money.'

"Jack walked over to the guy, and said, 'What did you say?' The guy repeated it. And Jack knocked him cold.

"And when Jack found out about the concentration camps he really was enraged. I remember him saying, 'There's got to be a way to kill Hitler.'"

Most agree that Ruby, a rough-and-tumble strip-tease club owner in Dallas, always strove for respectability. He believed that he was doing a service according to Ruby, for the nation and for the Jews by killing Oswald.

It hurt him very much that most



MOMENT SEEN BY MILLIONS: RUBY SHOTS OSWALD

Jews, I believe, were embarrassed by his action, and by the rumors of conspiracy," said Earl Ruby. "That's why he insisted on taking lie detector tests — which proved him out — and making a death-bed recording of the fact that he acted alone, and had never known Oswald.

"But most people, I think, sympathized greatly with him. We got thousands and thousands of letters and telegrams congratulating him. And once, when I went for an interview to be part of the Big Brother program, I met with a priest. He said, 'I know who

you are. You're Jack Ruby's brother. Well, I want you to know something. Never be ashamed of what your brother did. If given the chance, a lot of people — including me — would have done the same thing.'"

"Another thing that worried Jack was the hardship that he might be bringing on the family. I told him that I didn't think there was much.

"Oh, it cost us some money to fly up and back, and it took time. And, well, when it happened, the kids at my daughter's grade school called her,

'Killer Ruby,' but the principal called an assembly and put a stop to that.

"And it didn't hurt my business, nor my standing in the community. My business, after the first hard years, began to rise just before the assassination and continued to improve after.

"Questions persist, though," he said, smiling. "Some people can't understand how I built up such a good business unless I had CIA payoffs. I tell them they could do it too if they worked here 12 hours a day seven days a week."

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